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# Overall progress achieved since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development

## Report of the Secretary-General

## Addendum

## Conservation of biological diversity*

(Chapter 15 of Agenda 21)

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## I. KEY OBJECTIVES

1. The present report reviews progress made in the implementation of the objectives set out in chapter 15 of Agenda 21 (Conservation of biological diversity),1/ taking into account the decisions taken by the Commission on Sustainable Development on that subject at its third session, in 1995. The objectives and activities recommended in chapter 15 of Agenda 21 are to improve the conservation of biological diversity and the sustainable use of biological resources. The objectives related to the conservation of biodiversity are also addressed in the various provisions of the Convention on Biological Diversity and other related agreements.

2. The key objectives of chapter 15 of Agenda 21 concern the wide ratification and implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity and related agreements, and action plans will go a long way towards meeting those objectives. At its third session, in April 1995, the Commission on Sustainable Development stressed that the conservation of biological diversity and the sustainable use of its components cut across a wide spectrum of sectoral and cross-sectoral issues addressed in Agenda 21, and that the extent to which developing country Parties effectively implemented their commitments under the Convention would depend on the effective implementation by developed countries Parties of their commitments related to financial resources and the transfer of technology. The Commission recognized that the Convention provides a principal mechanism for advancing the objectives of chapter 15.

## II. SUCCESSES

3. The objectives of chapter 15 of Agenda 21 and those of the Convention on Biological Diversity, which came into force on 29 December 1993, set the stage for intensive action and consultation, creating an opportunity for cooperation among Governments, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, national and regional institutions, communities, target groups and individuals in the area of the conservation of biological diversity and the sustainable use of biological resources.

4. The Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA) has been established pursuant to article 25 of the Convention. The main task of that body is to provide the Conference of the Parties with scientific advice in order to facilitate the implementation of the Convention. The main issues that have emerged during SBSTTA sessions have been detailed technical issues, such as how to promote access to and transfer of technology, the development of monitoring systems and assessments, and issues dealing with agricultural, terrestrial, marine and coastal biodiversity and traditional knowledge.

5. Article 39 of the Convention appointed, on an interim basis, the Global Environmental Facility (GEF) to develop operation programmes based on ecosystems, using Conference of the Parties guidance and criteria of species diversity, endemism and degree of threat. Initially, those long-term operational programmes will focus on arid and semi-arid ecosystems. Their goals include progress in securing global biodiversity objectives and providing a framework for the design and implementation of national actions involving the

coordination of international, intersectoral and inter-agency activities. In 1995, the GEF Council approved US $24 million for the small grants programme. In that programme, which is mainly focusing on community-based activities, 147 grants have been approved within the area of biodiversity. A clearing-house mechanism to promote technical and scientific cooperation was launched by the Convention secretariat in 1996.

6. The second meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention, held in 1995, marked the beginning of the implementation of the principles of the Convention. A framework for global action was adopted that promotes support for and cooperation with other international bodies, and the development of a programme of work for the Convention process.

7. The Convention is evolving as a policy guidance body that seeks to promote action through existing institutions, as illustrated by the focus of decisions on framework programmes and guidance statements. The ability of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention to monitor its implementation will be enhanced by the analysis of national reports submitted by parties from 1997 on and the periodic publication of the Global Biodiversity Outlook.

8. The third meeting of the Conference of the Parties, held in November 1996 at Buenos Aires, highlighted the critical areas shared by the Convention and the objectives of sustainable development outlined in chapter 15 of Agenda 21.

9. A permanent secretariat has been established to ensure the effective implementation of the Convention under the guidance of the Conference of the Parties, and has commenced its work. National, regional and international initiatives in response to the various objectives of the Convention and chapter 15 of Agenda 21 have been made. Capacity-building to address scientific, technical, social and economic issues has been and continues to be instituted, and policy and legislative responses to the Convention have been or are in the process of being put in place.

10. The secretariat of the Convention is collaborating and cooperating with relevant United Nations entities, such as UNEP, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the United Nations Development Programme, the World Meteorological Organization, the World Trade Organization and the World Bank, as well as international non-governmental organizations, such as the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources - World Conservation Union (IUCN) and the World Wide Fund for Nature, in organizing training activities and regional meetings aimed at capacity-building and human resources development on the subject of biodiversity conservation and sustainable use.

11. As a cooperative activity of UNEP, the World Resources Institute (WRI) and IUCN, a set of guidelines on the preparation of biodiversity strategies and action plans was prepared and global biodiversity forums were organized to assist Governments and the public in integrating biodiversity components in improving the understanding of the role of biodiversity in sustainable development and in monitoring implementation and the reporting of progress made.

12. Many United Nations entities and non-governmental organizations have strengthened their activities on the economics of biological diversity so as to promote the use and development of economic instruments supportive of the implementation of the objectives of chapter 15 of Agenda 21 and the Convention on Biological Diversity.

## III. PROMISING CHANGES

13. With the Convention now entering its second phase and the guidance of the Commission, it is anticipated that Governments will move to integrate the conservation of biological diversity and the sustainable use of biological resources into national development plans and sectoral policies. National reports on country activities on biodiversity are due by 1 January 1998. As implementation gains momentum worldwide, Governments will increasingly recognize the importance of the conservation of biological diversity and the sustainable use of biological resources to their political agenda for socio-economic development.

14. The Seville Strategy on Biosphere Reserves adopted by UNESCO, the FAO Report on the Status of the World's Plant Genetic Resources, and the Global Plan of Action for the Conservation and Sustainable Utilization of Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture adopted at the International Technical Conference on Plant Genetic Resources (Leipzig, 1996) have together focused worldwide attention on the contribution of the Global Network of Biosphere Reserves and the Global Plan of Action on Plant Genetic Resources to the implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

15. The Intergovernmental Panel on Forests, in the consideration of its 11 priority issues, has included the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity in a cross-sectoral manner. The progress made in integrating relevant biodiversity concerns in all the forests priority issues of the Panel's programme of work was duly reflected in the reports of the Secretary-General to the Panel at its third session (Geneva, 9-20 September 1996). Areas of the Panel's work programme identified as the most relevants ones for integrating forest and biodiversity are national forest programmes; underlying causes of deforestation; traditional forest-related knowledge; trade in forest products and services; valuation of the multiple benefits of forests; qualitative forest assessment; and criteria and indicators for forests sustainability. Both the Panel and Conference of the Parties to the Convention have recognized the importance of the fruitful cooperation and mutually supportive working relation established between the two intergovernmental processes.

## IV. UNFULFILLED EXPECTATIONS

16. Although Governments, relevant United Nations bodies, non-governmental organizations and major groups, among others, have made great strides in meeting the formidable challenges inherent in the implementation of objectives and activities contained in the Convention and hence chapter 15 of Agenda 21, there are a number of key areas in which expectations remain unfulfilled, including (a) insufficient new and additional financial resources; (b) transfer of technologies for conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity;

(c) equitable sharing of benefits; (d) failure to integrate biodiversity into sectoral plans and national systems of accounts; (e) lack of incentives at the national, regional and global levels; and (f) rehabilitation and restoration of degraded ecosystems.

17. The insufficiency of new and additional financial resources envisaged under the Convention has had its telling effects on the efforts of all stakeholders in the field of biodiversity conservation and the sustainable use of genetic resources, particularly in developing countries. Part of the problem is insufficient national capabilities (human, technical and financial capabilities), so that its solution will require strengthening such capabilities.

18. It was expected that a permanent institutional structure for operating the financial mechanism under the Convention would be decided upon at the second meeting of the Conference of the Parties in Jakarta. The Conference of the Parties decided that the restructured GEF should continue, on an interim basis, to serve as the institutional structure on an interim basis, and in its decisions II/6 and II/7 instructed GEF to facilitate urgent implementation of articles 6 and 8 of the Convention by making available to developing country Parties financial resources for projects in a flexible and expeditious manner. It is hoped that the issue of replenishment of GEF and the level of funding by developed country Parties will meet the expectations of the Conference of the Parties for new and additional financial resources for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity.

19. Transfer of technologies relevant for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity continues to be a major area of unfulfilled expectations of most developing country Parties, who require those technologies in order to make use of their genetic resources sustainably without causing damage to the environment.

20. The failure to integrate biodiversity concerns into sectoral plans and national systems of accounts has hitherto been attributable to the lack of comprehensive methodologies for that purpose. However, significant progress is anticipated in that area, as more and more countries develop their national biodiversity strategies and action plans using the new UNEP/WRI/IUCN biodiversity planning guidelines. Considerable emphasis is laid in those guidelines on the need for incorporating appropriate incentive measures to underpin in situ and ex situ biodiversity conservation and its sustainable use, and to recognize and reward efforts by local and/or indigenous populations adjacent to protected areas.

21. Countries are still a long way from attaining the objective of providing incentive measures to enhance local benefits from biodiversity, including establishing secure property or use rights; providing education and relevant technologies; providing compensation for damage to crops, livestock and other property damaged by wild animals/predators; involving local communities in biodiversity management; and providing endowment funds or other financial mechanisms that ensure predictable and secure sources of income, such as user fees, franchises, land-use taxes and bonds.

22. The restoration and rehabilitation of habitats, which depend on the availability of material and its multiplication ex situ, will come to play increasingly major roles in re-establishing the integrity of degraded and damaged ecosystems. Expectations were high in the minds of the negotiators of the Convention regarding the possible rehabilitation and restoration of degraded and damaged ecosystems through the application of ecological principles and science and technology. The mounting pressure on existing ecosystems and the threat of their further degradation, however, gives much cause for alarm in view of the apparent inaction on already degraded ecosystems. Part of the problem is attributed to the absence of adequate national and regional capacities to deal with the problem in terms of the expert human resources required, including the need for technical, technological and infrastructural requirements.

23. Capacity-building initiatives would help, and the Conference of the Parties to the Convention, at its third meeting, directed GEF to address that issue. Committed trainers, educators and skilled people are the key to the successful maintenance and sustainable use of biodiversity. To build adequate and effective national capacity and expertise, there is a need to reorient the thrust of current training programmes. An essential element in the training of the next generation of professionals will require a new focus on the broader aspects of resources management and the critical role of maintaining adequate levels of biodiversity in conjunction with the management of forestry, fisheries and agriculture. Training of more skilled scientists must be provided for those developing and safe-guarding ex situ and in situ facilities of all kinds.

## V. EMERGING PRIORITIES

24. Over the years since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, a number of issues have emerged requiring urgent resolution in order to firmly secure the gains made in the field of biodiversity, including (a) focus on marine and aquatic biodiversity issues; (b) the crucial role of forests in conserving biological diversity; (c) greater awareness/advocacy for benefit sharing and equity; (d) biosafety issues; (e) the need for understanding ecosystem functioning; (f) the crucial role of biodiversity economics; (g) the FAO Undertaking on Plant Genetic Resources; (h) implementation of environmental impact assessments, taking into account relevant socio-economic and cultural aspects; (i) a greater role for private sector involvement; and (j) the importance of the precautionary approach and the users pay principle.

25. Recognition of and reward for traditional knowledge and practices of local communities and indigenous people, the role of women in the biodiversity arena, and the responsibility of the relevant private-sector entities have all generated a great deal of scope and hope for more effective means to provide incentives for conservation and the sustainable use of biodiversity and its components.

26. Issues of biosafety have emerged with regard to national capacity needed for the implementation of effective in situ conservation measures, through establishing and maintaining the means to regulate, manage or control risks associated with invasive species and/or the use and release of living modified organisms resulting from biotechnology and likely to have adverse environmental impacts on the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity. The

biosafety issue, in particular the public perception of the impact of biotechnology research, development and applications, is receiving due global attention and global consensus is building rapidly.

27. A greater understanding of ecosystem functioning through research and monitoring is needed not only with respect to the impact of invasive species and modified living organisms on the environment but also, as noted above, for the formulation, adoption and implementation of appropriate strategies and action plans that integrate the various biodiversity values of the ecosystems into the national development plans and sectoral policies.

28. The critical importance of integrating various biodiversity values for conservation and sustainable use has made biodiversity economics an especially challenging subject for the estimation of benefits derived from biological resources. Measuring the economic values of biological resources demands a great deal of information and appropriate methodologies. Application of such methodologies will shed more light on the socio-economic and scientific/ ecological aspects of the ecosystems valuation, and will benefit all stakeholders in their various biodiversity-related pursuits. It is important to demonstrate through biodiversity economics the relationship between economics, international trade and biodiversity to enable national Governments, local communities and the private sector to capture and share equitably the benefit of economic incentives for the sustainable use of genetic resources. The globalization of the economy and liberalization of markets should not lead to negative impacts in economics or the ecology of nations. Another relevant development in this regard is the UNCTAD BIOTRADE Initiative, which can be seen as a contribution in the area of economic valuation and economic incentive measures for promoting the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity.

29. The need to conserve the biotic wealth of aquatic ecosystems and the principles for doing so are less appreciated than for terrestrial ecosystems. The conservation and sustainable use of marine and aquatic biodiversity that lags decades behind is an emerging issue under the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States that requires a major focus globally.

30. Carrying out environmental impact assessments (EIAs) of proposed projects, programmes and plans likely to have significant adverse effects on biological diversity remains a major challenge, and is an issue that is attaining increasing importance for decision makers and those responsible for implementing policy. The economic challenge in managing biodiversity is to balance the benefits derived from sustainable resource use/conservation against the social and other costs caused by unsustainable use or non-use. The challenge to policy makers and those responsible for implementing policy is to develop institutional capacity for EIAs as well as to develop, adopt and apply methodologies that will confront resource users with the full social costs of their current or intended activities. A wide variety of sectors that have not hitherto examined the implications or consequences of their activities upon conservation and the sustainable use of biodiversity must be subjected to EIAs to determine environmental, economic and social costs and benefits.

31. A greater role for private-sector involvement in the sustainable use of biodiversity is emerging, and calls for priority attention by Governments in their efforts to address the issues of poverty and inequitable distribution of income and assets, both of which are causes and consequences of biodiversity loss and/or overexploitation. Private-sector participation is important in the formulation of economic and financial policies that could help address or redress market failures by capturing for the nation and its local populations the benefits from goods and services derived from biodiversity, especially biotechnology, which holds great promise for increasing the benefits from biodiversity. Cooperation and corporate responsibility of the private sector in acknowledging and addressing public concerns over unintended consequences of technological applications, including biotechnology, are essential for the success of economic and financial policies of Governments, including the implementation of transparent EIAs on proposed projects.

## Note

1/ See Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, vol. I, Resolutions Adopted by the Conference (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.93.I.8 and corrigendum), resolution 1, annex II.

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